

DARA SHIKOH AND THE ZAMINDARS OF BIHAR DURING WAR OF SUCCESSION

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ABSTRACT

Dara Shikoh had been very interesting personality and one of the important scholars of Mughal India. A lot has been written about him by the modern historians of India and the world but whatever studies have been done it appears to be macro level studies related to his role in the War of Succession and how he was closer to his father Shah Jahan. The studies are also related to the assessment of his personality in compare to Aurangzeb who proved himself a capable Prince and competent ruler. In this paper I have made an attempt to evaluate and assess Dara Shikoh's relationship with the zamindars of Bihar and his capability to win over different zamindars to his side during War of Succession. A proper analysis has been done in respect to his success in getting the support and assistance of the prominent zamindars of Bihar in his struggle for Mughal throne.

KEYWORDS: War of Succession, Support and Assistance of the Prominent

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INTRODUCTION

Muhammad Dara Shikoh was born on 11th March 1615 in Ajmer Rajasthan. He was the first son and third child of Prince Shahab-ud-din Muhammad Khurram (future Shah Jahan) and his second wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Dara Shikoh had thirteen siblings of whom six survived to adulthood: Jahanara Begum, Shah Shuja, Roshanara Begum, Aurangzeb, Murad Bakhsh, and Gauharara Begum. He shared a close relationship with his older sister, Jahanara. As part of his formal education, Dara studied the Quran, history, Persian poetry and calligraphy. He was a liberal-minded unorthodox Muslim unlike his father and his younger brother Aurangzeb. Persian was Dara's native language, but he also learned Hindi, Arabic and later Sanskrit. In October 1627, Dara's grandfather Emperor Jahangir died, and his father ascended the throne in January 1628 taking the regnal name 'Shah Jahan'. In 1633, Dara was appointed as the *Wali-ahad* (heir-apparent) to his father. He, along with his older sister Jahanara, was Shah Jahan's favourite children.

In this paper I have made an attempt to assess the leadership quality of Dara Shikoh during the War of Succession as he tried to win over some of the important *chieftains* of Bihar to his side against Prince Shah Shuja, one of his younger brothers who was quite active in Bihar as he was the governor of Bengal when the War of Succession broke out in Hindustan. Dara also struggled intensely for throne against his other brothers like Prince Aurangzeb and Prince Murad. Dara Shikoh was different from his real brothers and sisters in the sense that he was learned man and his written works are i.e., *Majma-ul-Bahrain*, *Sirr-i-Akbar*, *Safinat-ul-Awliya*, *Sakinat-ul-Awliya*, *Risaala-i-HaqNuma*, etc. He had commissioned a translation of *Yoga Vasistha* and completed the translation of fifty *Upanishads* from their original Sanskrit into Persian in 1657. Dara had developed a good relation with seventh Sikh guru, Guru Har Rai. He made an effort to find

a common mystical language between Islam and Hinduism. He had devoted and developed good interest in Sufistic and Vedantic philosophies. To develop an understanding on the theme I have consulted contemporary Persian Chronicles, *farmans*, *sanads*, local contemporary and near contemporary sources like *Tawarih-i-Ujjainias* and the secondary sources like books, journals, articles, etc.

Shah Jahan fell ill in September 1657 and his condition became critical within a few days. Shah Jahan had nominated Dara Shikoh as his successor and he was present at the court. He not only nursed his ailing father but also helped him in discharging the important affairs of the empire. Dara's brothers who were extremely jealous of his closeness to the emperor became suspicious of these developments. They believed that Shah Jahan had actually died and that Dara Shikoh had usurped his throne. Therefore Shah Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad, after reaching an understanding among them, proceeded towards Delhi to fight for the throne of Hindustan. The situation became so grave that the Mughal nobility too was divided on the issue. Almost every important noble was allied with one or the other prince. The princes themselves approached the local chiefs for support with the promise of higher *mansabs* and important offices. The *zamindars* of Bihar, especially Raja Bahroz, the Raja of Gidhaur and the Ujjainia chief, actually participated in this conflict in the region of Bihar. All of them were not in one camp, although Shuja who was the first to declare himself king and proceeded towards Delhi to contest Dara Shikoh, contacted some of these *zamindars* soon after reaching Patna. He was able to get the support of Raja Bahroz of Kharagpur and through his help; the Ujjainia chief also joined his camp. To firm up the alliance, Shah Shuja also issued *farmans* and *nishans* with lots of assurances.¹ In one of the *nishans* issued on behalf of Shah Shuja, it was clearly mentioned that Raja Bahroz had managed to bring Amar Singh, an Ujjainia chief, to the side of Shah Shuja and this fact had been acknowledged by the prince.

The Nishan Runs As Follows

The best of the peers and contemporaries, worthy of reviewing favours and privileges, Amar Singh, being duly honoured with royal gifts may know that in the present time the fact of having upright faith and true intentions of the one (Amar Singh) accustomed to bravery, deserving of favours, privileges, gifts, and kindness, has been brought to the notice of enlightened and the holiest (Shuja) by Raja Bahroz who is noted for his bravery and valour. Therefore, this order of high magnitude and conspicuous greatness reviewed the honour of being issued and dispatched to the effect that immediately on receipt of this high, auspicious and prosperous *Nishan* you (Amar Singh), being contented in every way, should come to the service of the wholly fortunate with or many means you can afford to collect so that after kissing the threshold you shall be rewarded with royal bounties and especial favours. Take this as urgent. It was written in 1068 A.H. (1658).

Dara Shikoh, on the other hand, was also making active efforts to get the support of important chiefs of the region and even issued a *farman* on behalf of Shah Jahan to the Raja of Gidhaur with the promise of not only a high *mansab* but even the chieftaincy of Kharagpur Raj, if he so desired. The *farman* runs as follows:

The best among the grandees and the like beings, the great among the equals and the contemporaries, worthy of receiving favours and privileges, Raja Dal Singh, the *zamindar* of Gidhaur, being duly honored with royal gifts, may know that in the present time the message of Sulaiman Shukoh Bahadur, the able and brave son, the fortunate and the well

¹Munshi Vinayak Prasad, *Tawarikh-i-Ujjainia*, Lucknow, Newal Kishore Press, 1898, vol. II, p. 57. (An Urdu text). This is an account of the family of Ujjainia and is available in four volumes in Khuda Baksh Library. Also B. P. Ambashthya, 'Some Historical Papers of Dumraon Raj in the Shahabad District in Bihar,' PIHC, 22nd Session, Guwahati, 1959, pp. 271-2.

behaved, the all-conquering and ever-fortunate by Lord's grace, the son of the ruling royal house, and of highest descent, having the blessings of God, the pearl of royal crown and of sublime Majesty, the star of sparkling wisdom and prudence, the cloud of showering generosity, privilege and power, ever-watering the flower of fortune, the all-embracing and all powerful prince expansive as sky, the good natured, reached (Dara) that he (Dal Singh) the best among the peers and contemporaries, under the guidance of the fortune, the faithful servant and the well-wisher of the empire, is treading the path of loyalty and would escort the royal force through his land against the cowardly and the disrespectful Shuja who did not discriminate between right and wrong, and after duly punishing him (Shuja), would drive him (Shuja) out of Munghyr and its quarter and would thus force him to lead the life of adversity. This news proved highly agreeable to me (Dara), and he (Dal Singh) was assured that in return for this service of his (Dal Singh's) he (Dal Singh) would have access to the presence of the emperor and would review royal favors and rewards and a good *mansab* and a good title; if he (Dal Singh) would want to get hold of the *zamindari* of Kharakpur from the hands of the unfortunate Bahroz, I (Dara) would agree to it and that he (Dal Singh) might uproot him (Bahroz) and occupy his (Bahroz's) territory. He (Dal Singh) was directed to communicate his wish so that the emperor might actually announce the favor regarding him (Dal Singh) and my (Dara's) gifts would also continue in his favor in future. Written on the date 21st of the month of Rajab, 1068 H. (in April, 1668 A.D.).

In this *farman* it appears that Dara Shikoh was desperate to win over to his side one of the prominent *zamindars* of Bihar. In this way, a number of *zamindars* of Bihar joined the rebellious princes and participated in their war of succession. Raja Bahroz, as mentioned earlier, was on the side of Shuja along with the Ujjainia chief; however, in the battle fought at Bahadurpur on 14 February 1658, there is hardly any reference to their active participation.²

Shah Shuja after being defeated at Bahadurpur, fled from the battle field towards Munger and fortified the town to defend himself from the pursuing army. In this effort, he was greatly helped by Raja Bahroz. In the meantime, Sulaiman Shikoh, the eldest son of Dara Shikoh who was pursuing Shah Shuja, was informed of the defeat of Jaswant Singh an important Mughal noble, at the hands of Aurangzeb and Murad in the battle of Dharmat (fought on 15 April 1658) and was asked to reach the capital, along with the forces under his command, as early as possible. Now the situation had completely changed. Sulaiman Shikoh, who had reached Munger at just about this time, decided to make a settlement with Shah Shuja. After a short negotiation, Shah Shuja was offered Orissa, Bengal and the territory of Bihar to the east of Munger, and a treaty was signed to this effect on 7 May 1658.³ Sulaiman Shikoh immediately marched back towards Agra to help his father against Aurangzeb.

Bhojpur also figured prominently in the war of succession between the four sons of Shah Jahan. This region was dominated by Shah Shuja. The prince also started for Agra with a large army to try his luck. Dara Shikoh sent Sulaiman Shikoh with 20,000 Mughal forces, accompanied by Raja Jai Singh of Amber, to face his uncle, Shah Shuja. The Ujjainia Rajputs of Bhojpur were brave fighters and their support was considered valuable for gaining victory in this eastern zone. Hence, both Dara Shikoh and Shah Shuja tried to win over the support of Amar Singh, the chief of Bhojpur.

In One of his *Nishans*, Shah Shuja Directed Amar Singh to Join his Camp. The *Nishan* Runs as Follows

The best of the peers and contemporaries, worthy of receiving favors and privileges, Amar Singh, being duly honored with royal gifts may know that in the present time the fact of having up right faith and true intentions of the one (Amar Singh)

² Muhammad Kazim, *Alamgirnama*, ed. Khadim Husain and Abdal Hai, Calcutta, Bibliotheca Indica, 1865-73, vol. I, p. 247.

³ Ibid.

accustomed to bravery, deserving of favors, privileges, gifts and kindness, has been brought to the notice of the enlightened and the holiest (Shah Shuja) by Raja Bahroz who is noted for his bravery and valor. Therefore, this order of high magnitude and conspicuous greatness received the honor of being issued and dispatched to the effect that immediately on receipt of this high auspicious and prosperous *Nishan* you (Amar Singh), being contended in every way, should come to the service of the wholly fortunate with as many men as you can afford to collect so that after viewing the threshold you shall be rewarded with royal bounties and special favors. Take this as urgent.⁴

A similar *Nishan* was sent by Dara Shikoh to Amar Singh in which the latter was asked to render all assistance to Prince Sulaiman Shikoh in his fight against his uncle, Shah Shuja. It is dated 26 January 1658 and the *Nishan* runs as follows:

The prop and pillar among his likes and contemporaries worthy of favors, Amar Singh *Ujjainia*, being duly rewarded with royal favors may know that whereas Prince Sulaiman Shikoh, the progeny of the rulers and victors, the sum and substance of the family greatness, the mandate of the Sultanat.... Therefore this order of high magnitude received the honor being issued to the effect that the pillar among the equals (Amar Singh) shall immediately on receipt of this high *Nishan* proceed successfully along with his brothers and followers to the service of the fortunate and noble prince (Sulaiman Shikoh) and shall render excessively loyal and faithful services and shall rest assured that the services rendered by the best among the equals (Amar Singh) shall be amply rewarded by imperial favors and grace. His rank shall of course be raised. Take this as urgent and know that the favors of the emperor shall be with you.⁵

Raja Amar Singh's attitude was a foregone conclusion. While the Bhojpur estate was under the possession of the governor of the *suba* of Bihar, Amar Singh had got the help of Shah Shuja in securing the possession of the Bhojpur estate. Naturally he was under a deep debt of obligation to the prince. It was natural that when his request for help came the Bhojpur chief rallied to his support in the preference to that of Dara Shikoh.

When Prince Sulaiman Shikoh found that Amar Singh had joined the side of his uncle, he turned to Koklat Ujjainia,⁶ a rival of Amar Singh and a claimant to the chieftaincy of Bhojpur, who immediately agreed to support him. Sulaiman's action was approved by his father, Dara Shikoh and the prince issued a *Nishan* to Koklat, which was handed over to him through Mirza Raja Singh. It runs as follows:

Mirza Raja Jai Singh may know that his Majesty, the holder of the caliphate and the Soloman of the time, had according to my request, raised the *mansab* of Koklat Ujjainia to 1000 *Zat* and 800 *Sawar* and bestowed upon him the *jagirs* in *Pargana* Piru and Danwar and in this respect the *Nishan* in favor of Koklat has been sent to pillar of the state (Mirza Raja Jai Singh) so that he may issue a *farman* by his own hands to further assure him.⁷

The forces of Shah Shuja and those of Sulaiman Shikoh had taken up their positions near Bahadurpur (near Varanasi). Shah Shuja's forces were stationed in the middle of a dense forest. It was difficult for the soldiers of Sulaiman

⁴B.P. Ambashthya, "Some Historical Papers of Dumraon Raj", *PIHC* 1959, Bombay Session, p. 272.

⁵B.P. Ambashthya, op.cit., pp. 273-74.

⁶Koklat was the son of Hardat Shah and the great-grandson of Chilbar Shah, a younger son of Sangram. He had been recognized as the chief of Bhojpur by Dara (Roy Chaudhary, Shahabad, Bihar District Gazetteers, p. 75).

⁷The *Nishan* is dated 21st *Rabi-us-Sani* 1068 A.H. corresponding to 16 January, 1658 A.D. Here is some confusion. The *Nishan* addressed to Amar Singh from Dara is dated 26th January, 1658 whereas *Nishan* to Jai Singh is dated 16th January, 1658. The *Nishan* to Amar Singh from Shah Shuja was issued sometime in the end of 1657. It appears that Sulaiman who had already proceeded to Eastern Provinces had come to know about Amar Singh joining the side of Shah Shuja. Hence, he entered into alliance with Koklat which was approved by Dara Shikoh in his *Nishan* dated 16th Jan, 1658. The *Nishan* to Amar Singh by Dara Shikoh seems to be a diplomatic move to wear away Amar Singh from the side of Shah Shuja.

Shikoh to enter it and attack his forces. Hence, Sulaiman's army stood helpless. When Dara Shikoh came to know of this, he dispatched instructions to Raja Jai Singh at once through a letter written on behalf of Emperor Shah Jahan. It is dated February 1658. The letter was written on the very day when the battle of Bahadurpur took place. The *Nishan* contained the following instructions:

How long will it continue like this? What plan you have made to destroy the enemy? If you have not decided upon anything, make it clear to me so that from this place I may suggest some plan and send instructions as to what should be done? At present you should request Gokul Chand Ujjainia (Koklat Ujjainia), the *zamindar* of that place to send the footmen and soldiers in all directions and close the roads of grain supplies to the enemy, and a similar force should be sent over to Banaras side, for carrying on an irregular fight and closing the enemy's roads for the supply of foodstuffs. It is very likely that the enemy, sick of trenches, may come out and decide to fight or fly.⁸

On 14 February 1658, the armies of Shah Shuja and Sulaiman Shikoh clashed with each other. Shah Shuja was helped by Amar Singh Ujjainia and Sulaiman Shikoh was backed by Koklat Ujjainia (Gokul Chand Ujjainia). The battle took place at Bahadurpur. Sulaiman Shikoh inflicted a crushing defeat on Shah Shuja. The latter fled towards Bengal and was hotly pursued by his victorious nephew. In a *Nishan* issued by Dara Shikoh, Sulaiman Shikoh was ordered to pursue the enemy (Shah Shuja) and to besiege the fort of Munger if he had taken shelter there. He was further told that if the rebel (Shah Shuja) fled to Rajmahal, the siege of Munger was to be continued but some forces were to be dispatched in his pursuit.⁹

However, Sulaiman Shikoh had to give up his campaign against Shah Shuja because Dara Shikoh urgently summoned him to Agra to help him in his war against the combined forces of Aurangzeb and Murad. Compelled by circumstances, he concluded peace with Shah Shuja and proceeded towards Agra. Therefore, for some time, Shah Shuja was left with no rival and became the undisputed master of the Eastern Provinces. It is quite important to note that as Amar Singh the Ujjainia chief had joined Shah Shuja and Dara Shikoh also needed support at the time of War of Succession and he found a powerful chief Koklat Ujjainia the rival of Amar Singh and brought him to his side. However, after the defeat of Dara Shikoh, Koklat Ujjainia was also defeated and expelled by Shah Shuja from the Bhojpur region.

It seems that the chief of Gidhaur chiefaincy also played an active role during the War of Succession. The Emperor Shah Jahan, Dara Shikoh and Shah Shuja tried to win over the Gidhaur Chief as we find the reference of *farmans*, addressed to Raja Dulan Singh of Gidhaur, asking the later for help.

In the following *farman* Shuja has addressed to Raja Dal Singh of Gidhaur during 19th March 1658 A.D.¹⁰

The best of the peers and contemporaries, the highest among the equals and the grandees, Dal Singh (Dulan Singh) being hopeful of receiving the royal favors, may know that the fact of his unfailing sincerity and correct faith has come to the notice of the most Enlightened and the Highest through the attendants. This has rendered necessary the conferment of royal favors upon him (Dal Singh) since by the way of favor and for the satisfaction of the best of the contemporaries, I am sending the impression of the hand, he ought to proceed to the

⁸ Rajiv Nain Prasad, *History of Bhojpur*, Patna, KP Jaiswal Research Institute, 1987, p.65.

⁹ Ibid. The *Nishan* is dated 25 March 1658, available at Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

¹⁰ B.P. Ambashthaya, "Some *Farmans*, *sanads*, *Nishans* and *Inscriptions in Bihar*", *JBR*, Vol. XLIII, Sept.-December 1957, Parts III & IV, pp. 224-225.

court of his exalted majesty with all his *sawars* (cavalry) and Payandah (infantry) which he may have at his disposal, so that he shall be raised and distinguished with royal favors. He should take up this matter with all seriousness and care and act in keeping with exalted order.¹¹

According to *farmans* of Shuja it is clear that he is in desperate need of help from all sides. As he had been defeated by Sulaiman Shikoh at Bahadurpur near Benares on 14th February, 1658. He gave all assurance of favor to Raja Dal Singh to get his support in his war of succession.

In another *farman* Prince Dara Shikoh on behalf of emperor Shahjahan had addressed to Raja Dal Singh and sought his help. This *farman* was issued on 14th April 1658.¹²

The best among the grandees and the like beings, the great among the equals and the contemporaries, worthy of receiving favors and privileges, Raja Dal Singh, the *zamindar* of Gidhaur, being duly honored with royal gifts, may know that in the present time to message of Sulaiman Shikoh Bahadur, the able and the brave son, the fortunate and the well behaved, the all-conquering and ever-fortunate by Lord's grace, the son of the ruling royal house, and of highest descent, having the blessings of God, the pearl of royal crown and of sublime Majesty, the star of sparkling wisdom and prudence, the cloud of showering generosity, privileges and power, ever-watering the flower of fortune, the all embracing all powerful prince expansive as sky, the good natured, reached (Dara Shikoh) that he (Dal Singh), the best among peers and contemporaries, under the guidance of the fortune, the faithful servant and the well-wisher of the empire, is treading the path of loyalty and would escort the royal force through his land against the cowardly and the disrespectful Shah Shuja who did not distinguished between right and wrong, and after duly punishing him (Shah Shuja), would drive him (Shah Shuja) out of Munger and its quarter and would thus force him to lead the life of adversity. This news proved highly agreeable to me (Dara Shikoh), and he (Dal Singh) was assured that in return for this service of his (Dal Singh's) he (Dal Singh) would have access to the presence of the emperor and would receive royal favors and rewards and a good *mansab* and a good title; if he (Dal Singh) would want to get held of the *zamindari* of Kharakpur from the hands of the unfortunate Bahroz, I (Dara) would agree to it and that he (Dal Singh) might uproot him (Bahroz) and occupy his (Bahroz's) territory. He (Dal Singh) was directed to communicate his wish so that the emperor might actually announce the favor regarding him (Dal Singh), and my (Dara's) gifts would also continue in his favor in future.¹³

According to the *farman*, it appears that Raja Dal Singh of Gidhaur supported Dara Shikoh in his struggle against Shah Shuja. It also appears that Dara Shikoh was not happy with Raja Bahroz of Kharakpur because he was supporting Shah Shuja. As Dara Shikoh assured Raja Dal Singh that if he wished he could get the *zamindari* of Kharakpur Raj.

¹¹. Ibid.

¹². Some *Farmans, Sanads, Nishans and Inscription in Bihar*, op.cit. pp. 225-227.

¹³. Some *Farmans, Sanads, Nishans and Inscription in Bihar*, op.cit. pp. 225-227.

CONCLUSION

It is quite interesting to note that Dara Shikoh tried his level best to convince the zamindars of Bihar to get their support but it seems that he failed to win over even few powerful zamindars of Bihar to his side. He had not developed good relation with the zamindars of Bihar and specially the chieftains of Rajputanas at the time of war of succession, as he was not given or he had not taken any important assignments away from Delhi. He had not learnt the strategies of warfare as he had not faced hardship in his life and mostly, he remained in the company of his beloved father, Shah Jahan. He had not got opportunity to prove himself a capable general and brave commander. But on the other side, his other brothers specially Aurangzeb and Shuja had proved themselves as brave commanders and diplomats. Dara was taking more interest to win over the different *zamindars* of Bihar against the Prince Shah Shuja and even he mobilized his best forces under the command of his son Sulaiman Shikoh against Shuja. No doubt Dara was very popular among a large section of the society as he was liberal like Akbar but he failed in the race of diplomacy, strategy and a capable general.

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6. Koklat was the son of Hardat Shah and the great-grandson of Chilbar Shah, a younger son of Sangram. He had been recognized as the chief of Bhojpur by Dara (Roy Chaudhary, *Shahabad, Bihar District Gazetteers*, p. 75).
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